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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2009

In Today's Papers

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Q AQ Charged in 'Revenge Attack for Gaza;' Jewish Community 'Uneasy'

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Gul Goes to Saudi Arabia; Erdogan Receives Sudanese VP
Mainstream Sabah reports that President Gul is going to Saudi Arabia today together with 90 businessmen and four Ministers. This will be Turkey's first presidential-level visit to Saudi Arabia in 19 years.

Meanwhile, Sabah notes that Iranian President Ahmedinejad invited President Gul to Iran to attend the Economic Cooperation summit on March 11. According to Iranian State TV, Deputy FM Muhsin Telai will come to Ankara today to present the invitation. Mainstream Milliyet reports, "PM Erdogan is entertaining an interesting guest today" as "Erdogan will receive the deputy (Vice President Ali Osman Muhammed) to President Omar al-Bashir, the man who is charged with annihilating Christian and non-Arab Africans in Sudan." Milliyet also reports that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will come to Ankara this weekend on President Gul's invitation and he will meet with PM Erdogan as well.

AQ Charged in 'Revenge Attack for Gaza;' Jewish Community 'Uneasy'
Last week, one al-Qaeda militant was killed, one was wounded and four others were captured while trying to rob a post office in the strictly conservative Sultanbeyli neighborhood in Istanbul. According to today's mainstream Hurriyet, the suspects were planning to assassinate a Jewish religious figure in retaliation for the Israeli offensive in Gaza, whereas mainstream Vatan believes the militants were plotting an attack on a Jewish restaurant in the city. On Monday, eight of the 11 suspects taken into custody were charged and the other three were released.

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports Jewish community spokesman

and Salom newspaper writer Ivo Molinas warned Monday against the rising anti-Semitism in Turkey over Israel's Gaza attacks. "Can you imagine how some 4,000 Jewish children felt during the [Education Ministry-ordered] minute of silence observed at elementary and high schools for the children killed in Gaza? Inscribing into the minds of little kids enmity against the Jews is not right. The Education Ministry was also planning to hold a Gaza essay contest in schools. It's good that they dropped the idea after our warnings; otherwise children would be competing to see 'who can draw the bloodiest picture, or who will express the bloodiest rhetoric,'" emphasized Molinas. Molinas also stressed the Jewish community was 'getting uneasy' in Turkey, and that PM Erdogan's efforts have turned into anti-Semitism on the streets.

Mainstream Hurriyet reports religious affairs directorate, Diyanet, instructed its imams at mosques to issue calls for common sense at Friday sermons this week. The decision came when the head of the Jewish community in Turkey, Silviyo Ovadya, visited Diyanet chief Professor Ali Bardakoglu to express concern about provocations targeting Turkey's Jews in the aftermath of the Israeli operations in Gaza.

PKK-Hezbollah Tensions Intensify on the Eve of Municipal Elections
Media outlets report around 200 PKK supporters attacked the office of the Social Solidarity and Council Organization, Surader, in Adana, with Molotov Cocktails and stones, injuring 20 people. Surader is known to be one of the several civilian affiliates of the Turkish Hezbollah. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, in a news-commentary, notes this was the first conflict between Hezbollah

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and the PKK in 12 years, and warns that tensions, already high in Adana and Mersin, might spread to other provinces in the mainly Kurdish east and southeast Turkey. The PKK views Hezbollah as an ally of the Fettullah Gulen community, so the PKK uses violence against them.

Erdogan - Hero or Failed Negotiator?

Media continue to assess the impact of PM Erdogan's criticism of Israel on Turkey's global reputation. Pro-government outlets emphasize UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's supportive phone call to Erdogan, while other outlets note Turkey's role as international mediator could soon be over as, behind the scenes, bilateral ties with Israel are viewed to be in crisis. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak quotes UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon during a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Erdogan in the headline, "There Is A Need for Your Leadership and Mediation in the Middle East." Conservative-nationalist Turkiye reports, "Moon Supports Erdogan in the Davos Controversy." Mainstream Vatan reports, "Erdogan Is A Hero in the Middle East," as "demonstrations in Gaza, Iran, Syria, Jordan, and Sudan praise Erdogan."

However, in "Israel Behind the Scenes," Vatan notes, "an anonymous Israeli government official said, 'We have lost our trust in Erdogan' and 'We no longer see Turkey as objective,' so 'It will be impossible for Turkey to continue its role as a mediator between the Israel and the Middle East.'" Meanwhile, Mainstream Milliyet reports, "Weapons Sales Could Stop," as "Erdogan's harsh criticism of Israeli President Peres could have damaged a long-standing bilateral relationship between Israel and Turkey," and "an unnamed Israeli defense official indicated that Israel may reject military sales requests from Turkey," and in turn a bilateral crisis could emerge because "Ankara could respond by cancelling its permission to allow the Israeli military to use Turkish airspace for Air Force training." Milliyet columnist Sami Kohen writes, "Ankara does not think it needs ties with Israel or the U.S. because Turkey is becoming a force in the Middle East," and "Ankara instead believes that other countries should be concerned about the consequence of losing Turkey." However, Kohen warns Ankara to proceed with caution, "The Arab World is not unified (in their views of Hezbollah and Hamas), and it is important to remember that there are divisions among Palestinians." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "Turkey's Mediator Role Is Finished," as "Turkey's support for Hamas will not be successful in the international arena," since Turkey actually seems to have "taken over the role of Iran backing Hamas and Hizbullah."

Editorial Commentary on the 'Davos Incident'

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Turkey has gained an important strategic card in the aftermath of the Davos incident. Ankara does not think it needs ties with Israel or the U.S. because Turkey is becoming a force in the Middle East and Ankara instead believes that other countries should be concerned about the consequence of losing Turkey. From now on Ankara should be extra careful when playing its cards in order to preserve a balance between Israel and Palestine. The Arab World is not unified (in their views of Hezbollah and Hamas), and it is important to remember that there are even divisions among Palestinians. "

Cengiz Candar wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "Turkey's powerful influence is timely and fills the vacuum in the Middle East power game. Turkey is the only country that can balance Iran's de facto power in the region."

Akif Emre wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "Israel's power is overrated by Turkish elitists. There is a deliberate campaign to present Israel and the Jewish lobbies in the Diaspora as more powerful than they actually are. In fact Israel needs Turkey much more than vice versa."

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Mehmet Y. Yilmaz wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "As the annual April 24 incident approaches, Turkey should be able to think and act beyond expectations for a mild statement from the U.S. President or a helping hand from Jewish organizations. Regardless of what is next, the fact of the matter is that more than half of the world disagrees with Turkey's thesis on the Armenian genocide. This is an issue which calls for a comprehensive public relations effort from Turkey and no one else."

DTP Members Protest JITEM

Milliyet: A group of DTP members, including DTP Diyarbakir deputy Gulden Kisanak and DTP mayors, protested the alleged covert intelligence unit in the gendarmerie (JITEM) in Diyarbakir's Saraykapi neighborhood yesterday. DTP deputy provincial chair Ali Simsek accused JITEM of being responsible for hundreds of missing people and unresolved murders in Diyarbakir.

TRT to Launch Armenian TV, Radio and Webpage

Pro-government Sabah reports the state-owned TRT television is preparing to set up a television channel, a radio station and a webpage in Armenian. The radio and webpage will be up in two months. Turkey's National Security Council (MGK) has advised the TRT in a report five months ago that broadcasts in Armenian would be a major factor in countering the Armenian Diaspora's anti-Turkey propaganda, says Sabah.

Obama Approves CIA Renditions

Media criticize U.S. President Barack Obama for coming to office on a platform of change, but continuing the Bush Administration's policy of allowing secret CIA renditions. Mainstream Sabah reports, "He Closed Gitmo, But He Approved Ghost Prisons." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines, "Change Won't Be That Easy." Liberal Radikal writes, "Obama Will Continue The Illegality." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "He Approved the CIA's Torture Flights." Leftist Taraf headlines, "Offensive Claims Against Hope For Obama." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak headlines, "Secret Permission From Obama."

TV News: CNN Turk

Domestic News

- State Minister Mehmet Simsek says the ten-day hiatus in talks with the IMF might be extended if the sides fail to work out disagreements.

- Istanbul's prestigious Bilgi University is preparing to offer elective Kurdish-language lessons to its students in the Kurmanchi dialect.

- A prosecutor initiates an investigation against the pro-Kurdish DTP for using the Kurdish language during an election rally in Van.

- Automotive exports dive by 53 percent, overall Turkish exports decline by 28 percent in January.

International News

- British commander Major General Andy Salmon says British troops in Iraq are on track to begin leaving the country by May 31.

- Turkey is ranked 57th among 158 countries in KOF Index of Globalization 2009, calculated by the Zurich-based Economic Institute KOF to measure the economic, social and political dimensions of globalization.

- A protester throws a shoe at the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao during a speech at Cambridge University.

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JEFFREY